



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE FINANCIAL INVESTIGATORS SEIZE \$671,000 FROM CORRUPT FOREIGN OFFICIALS *Shell company used to launder stolen funds from Nicaragua government*

MIAMI-- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have unraveled a complicated helicopter purchase-lease scheme and seized \$671,000 in proceeds meant for corrupt Nicaragua foreign officials.

ICE special agents from Miami, Houston and the ICE Attaché Office in Panama City, Panama traced public funds that had been embezzled and misappropriated by former Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Aleman and Byron Jerez, the country's former tax commissioner.

They found that in 2000 about \$1.7 million of stolen funds traceable to the Nicaraguan Treasury were used to purchase a helicopter in Texas by Servicios Ejecutivos Nacionales (SENA), a dummy or "shell" corporation.

SENA, controlled by Aleman, leased the helicopter to the Nicaraguan government for official business and all lease payments were channeled to bank accounts with Aleman as the sole beneficiary.

In 2002, the helicopter was sold to a private business in Guatemala for \$1.1 million and the proceeds were directed to an aviation escrow account in Oklahoma. SENA made \$671,000 in profit from the sale, which ICE seized in April 2003.

On Oct. 26, following negotiations between the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Oklahoma and counsel representing SENA, a stipulation for Consent Judgment and Final Order of Forfeiture was signed that awarded \$621,000 to ICE and \$50,000 to the claimant for the funds, which is the attorney defending SENA.

“ICE brings unique financial investigative expertise, powerful statutory authority and cutting-edge investigative techniques in the conduct of money laundering investigations,” said Special Agent-in-Charge Jesus Torres, who leads ICE's Miami investigations. “Our goal is to find, seize and return corrupt official’s misappropriated funds to their appropriate government and assist these governments to remain stable.”

Both Aleman and Jerez have been convicted of numerous violations relating to these misappropriated funds and are serving sentences in Nicaragua.

ICE created the Miami Foreign Corruption/Financial Task Force Unit in August. The task force is comprised of agents from ICE and prosecutors from the U.S. Attorney’s Southern District Office. The Miami task force is the only one in the nation that specifically targets the proceeds of public corruption, bribery, and embezzlement by foreign nationals.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.